
1 INTRODUCTION

The Town of Blacksburg is at an important juncture in its evolution. While it still maintains elements of a small town, Blacksburg has become a dynamic and ever-changing community of nearly 40,000 people. Over the next two decades, the Town can expect to experience additional growth pressures, primarily from the expansion of Virginia Tech and the completion of regional transportation improvements. However, attracting sustainable, highly quality economic development will not occur without some effort and purpose. Recent history has shown that Blacksburg's economic base is vulnerable to outside competition and unless it takes a more aggressive approach to economic development, it will continue to lose jobs, new investment, and tax revenues to neighboring communities.

Currently, the Town of Blacksburg is the premier residential community in the New River Valley, but with this reputation the Town has experienced increased residential demand, rising real estate values, and other impacts associated with growth. In order to maintain its premier status, the Town must be able to prioritize its development goals and be prepared to protect areas or shape development in ways that achieve the community's vision of the future. This will require the Town to be more engaged and proactive on economic development issues and take steps to increase the Town's economic development capacity.

The *Town of Blacksburg Economic Development Strategy* provides a critical review and analysis of Blacksburg's economic development capacity and establishes priorities for future initiatives. This plan is not a "soup to nuts" recipe for all that ails the Town. The plan identifies opportunities for the Town to promote new economic growth, create employment for local residents, and increase its tax base, while recognizing the importance of protecting the Town's neighborhoods, its natural resources, and quality of life. The plan's recommendations are designed to capitalize on the Town's natural competitive advantages without adversely impacting the qualities that make Blacksburg a special place to live.

The approach used to complete this analysis was based on the following assumptions. Number one, the Town's economy does not operate in a vacuum and therefore it must try to respond to, and capitalize on, economic and market forces that are impacting the greater region and the nation. Number two, many of the forces that will shape the Town's economy in the future are largely beyond the control of local decision-makers. However, local decisions can and will influence the outcome of individual development projects as they are proposed. Finally, due to the complicated nature of development in Blacksburg, the Town must focus its limited economic development resources on areas or initiatives that require the Town's participation and offer the greatest benefits to the community.

Within this context, RKG Associates, Inc. has examined where the Town should invest its financial and human capital in an attempt to shape its economic future. The consultants contacted or interviewed a number of persons who were knowledgeable about the Town's economic development potential. In addition, the Town of Blacksburg's Mayor's Office mailed out 1,600 shopper surveys in order to obtain input from area households about how they view Blacksburg as a shopping destination. The comments and opinions of these individuals have been documented and incorporated into this document and its recommendations. It is hoped that this plan will represent the vision and aspirations of Blacksburg residents and prepare the Town to meet the challenges of an emerging and exciting economic period.

The Town of Blacksburg Economic Development Strategy consists of the following chapters.

- Chapter 1 – Introduction
- Chapter 2 – Executive Summary
- Chapter 3 – Business Climate Factors
- Chapter 4 – Economic Base Analysis
- Chapter 5 – Real Estate Market Analysis
- Chapter 6 – Retail Market Analysis
- Chapter 7 – Implementation Strategy